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Chemicals Found in Common Disinfectants Linked to Asthma, Birth Defects and Infertility

Quaternary ammonium compounds, or quats, which are used in disinfectants are linked to asthma, dermatitis, inflammation, infertility, birth defects and other problems.

By Environmental Health News

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By Brian Bienkowski

Disinfectants have had a moment since the COVID-19 pandemic began — and scientists are warning that this widespread use is spurring health problems, antimicrobial resistance and harming the environment.

"It's ironic that the chemicals we're deploying in vain for one health crisis are actually fueling another," Erica Hartmann, a co-author of a new study examining the dangers of disinfectants and an associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern University, said in a statement.

Hartmann and colleagues' new study, published this week in Environmental Science & Technology, examines quaternary ammonium compounds, or quats, which are used in disinfectants and personal care products.

They reviewed the existing environmental and human health science on quats, which have been used much more since the pandemic began, and found that the compounds are linked to asthma, dermatitis, inflammation, infertility, birth defects and other problems.

They can also harm aquatic life and cause antimicrobial resistance, which can make drug-resistant viruses and bacteria.

"Antimicrobial resistance was already contributing to millions of deaths per year before the pandemic," Hartmann said. "Overzealous disinfection, especially with products containing [quats], threaten to make it worse."

Quat use and exposure

Quats can be found in disinfectants, baby wipes, eye drops, hair conditioners, fabric softeners and other products.

There was a spike in disinfectant use when the COVID-19 pandemic began, increasing exposure, and researchers saw an associated spike in quats in people.

People are mostly exposed via their skin and breathing quats, but food and water could be other potential sources of exposure.

Certain professions, including housekeepers, food or medical equipment preparation, dental assistants and nurses, are more highly exposed. Children and teachers may also have elevated exposure.

"Disinfectant wipes containing [quats] are often used on children's school desks, hospital exam tables and in homes where they remain on these surfaces and in the air," Courtney Carignan, a co-author and assistant professor at Michigan State University's Center for Research on Ingredient Safety, said in a statement.

The most common quat is benzalkonium chloride, but if you see ingredients on labels that end in "ammonium chloride," there are probably quats in the product.

The authors point out that U.S. regulation varies — pesticides, for example, list quats, while paints do not. Most quats are unregulated, and so are not tested for health impacts. This makes it a challenge to tease out how much people are exposed or what the health impacts are.

While the feds haven't tested the compound, academic researchers have linked the chemicals to multiple health problems, and the authors point out that there is evidence going back more than 70 years that the chemicals spur antimicrobial resistance.

Using safer cleaning products

The authors recommend not using quat-containing compounds when the chemicals are unnecessary. Soap and water usually do the trick — and if you need a disinfectant, the University of Massachusetts Lowell has a guide to safer products.

"Drastically reducing many uses of QACs won't spread COVID-19," Carol Kwiatkowski, a co-author and scientist at the Green Science Policy Institute, said in a statement.

Kwiatkowski continued:

> "In fact, it will make our homes, classrooms, offices, and other shared spaces healthier."

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Brian Bienkowski is the senior news editor at Environmental Health News.

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BChristine
2 days ago

I use two things for "disinfecting": Rubbing alcohol for some cleaning (vinegar/baking soda/castile soap for other); vodka and/or Everclear grain alcohol mixed with a few drops of glycerin and essential oil for a pocket hand sanitizer. The majority of hand sanitizers on the market are made in China and/or have toxic ingredients ... remember that skin is your largest organ.

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emmanuelozon
2 days ago

The ONLY thing I have used hand "sanitizer' for is to start fires. I have never put that stuff on my hands.

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Polly Green
2 days ago

Guess what benzalkonium chloride is made from? GMO corn! I'm allergic to corn and every kind of moist wipe (except Benifect wipes) have benzalkonium chloride as a preservative. It's often offered as a sanitizing wipe by medical labs for cleanup purposes for urine testing. It's in eye drops and even a product called "water wipes" because rosemary oil (an effective sterilizer) is too easy I suppose.
The push from most primary care physicians prior to Covid was avoidance of antibiotics to reduce resistance, which clued me into the scam almost immediately. Why would they recommend hand sanitizers, I wondered, when people who caught Covid were dying of SECONDARY bacterial infections? Well, the medical establishment had been overtaken by globalists who actually sought population reduction. QED.

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Jennifo
a day ago

Is this 2023 news?! I am a canary in a coalmine after my sinus surgery. I can smell chlorine, Febreze, Lysol & God help me... Fabuloso one foot into any building! They are so toxic.

So when everyone was so stupidly spraying & wiping EVERYTHING with bleach & chemicals to an already very harmful upper respiratory infection...duh. Clueless people who were harming themselves even more.

We MUST stop thinking that everything must smell like SOMETHING for it to be clean. Just clean the dang thing (hands, door knobs, counter, keys, etc.)

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> **BChristine** → Jennifo
> a day ago
>
> I agree. Those "scented" i.e. chemical products disgust me - there is NOTHING good about them. They are toxic to the environment, any living being, along with the surfaces and machinery they are used on ... and I hate those GAIN commercials!!
>
> 0 0 Reply • Share ›

Rob DF
a day ago

I have never understood the point of hand sanitizer. If my hands need to be cleaned I wash

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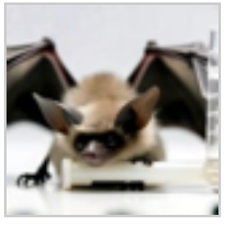

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